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*Migrants' chances or choices  
in a sub-protective welfare regime?*

*Summary*

Even more intensely since the recession, employment conditions deteriorated, and welfare systems continued their reforming processes. Southern European countries saw their labour market situation worsened. Immigrants were one of the social groups more affected by high unemployment, informal and precarious working conditions. The article focuses on the main groups of immigrants in Portugal (Brazilians, Ukrainians and Cape Verdeans). It aims to test if and how, depending on their different forms of insertion into the labour market and relationship with the social protection system, these groups

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of immigrants coped with massive unemployment and precarious working conditions in different ways. According to the country of origin, weak/strong networks, secure/insecure position at work or personal circumstances, they could either choose to stay, re-emigrate or return to their origin countries. Empirical analysis is based on focus groups with unemployed immigrants, an online survey, and statistical data analysis. Findings suggest that, in a highly segmented labour market, under a weak and fragmented social protection system, the migrants' individual decision is induced by the social structure, and not so much by individual agency.

**Key words:** immigrants, unemployment, welfare state regime, Portugal, social networks

## *Introduction*

As the literature largely documents, the 2007–2018 crisis affected European countries in a very intense way, with differences in speed and outcomes (Basso, Dolls, Eichhorst, Leoni, Peichl, 2011; Taylor-Goody, Leruth, Chung, 2017). Considerable amount of research has been devoted to the effects of the crisis on welfare state reforms and labour market transformations and how they impacted migratory patterns (Aja, Arango, Oliver Alonso, 2009; Collett, 2011; Panichella, 2017; Tilly, 2011). Some authors examined the situation in Southern Europe regarding the effects of the crisis on the integration of immigrants in the labour market (Panichella, 2017; Ponzio, Finotelli, Malheiros, Fonseca, Salis, 2015; Tilly, 2011).

This paper focuses on the case of Portugal, one of the Southern European societies where a weak institutional set-up of social protection and incomplete policies of social integration linked with deteriorating labour market conditions, had negative economic and social consequences for immigrant populations. Our purpose is not to dissect the effects of the crisis on migratory flows, but to examine why and how the three larger foreign communities living in Portugal (Brazilians, Ukrainians and Cape Verdeans) were more intensely affected by the labour market difficult situation, and how, combining different elements of vulnerability, they experienced and coped with unemployment differently. Following an institutionalist approach, we investigate if and how the system of welfare, along with labour market specific arrangements, influence immigrants' chances of (fully) participating into the Portuguese society, and, in periods of recession, represent higher risks of unemployment and social exclusion.

As for methods, this paper drives on registered data from annual reports of the Portuguese Aliens and Borders Service (SEF) and administrative data gathered by the Institute of Employment and Training (IEFP), and from fieldwork within the project *When Work Disappears. Immigrants Unemployed in Portugal (2012–2014)*<sup>4</sup>. The later consisted on 3 focus groups with 12 unemployed individuals. These immigrants would

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<sup>4</sup> This project was jointly funded by the Luso-American Foundation and by the High-Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Communities (currently High Commissioner for Migration). None of these funders were involved in the research process.

be unemployed, looking for a (new) job and available to start working. Participants in the focus groups were selected on the basis of making the sample as representative of the unemployed population belonging to the three groups (Brazilians, Ukrainians and Cape Verdeans) as possible, considering, namely, the duration and access to both formal and informal unemployment support of (e.g. public benefits, networks, programs for voluntary return). Even so, access to the research group was particularly difficult. This can be explained because people (immigrants in particular) are not always willing to talk about their experience of being unemployed (for instance, when they are in an irregular situation). Their own consciousness about their psychological, social and even economic vulnerability may limit their capacity of reconstructing their unemployment trajectory (Valadas, Góis, Marques, 2014, p. 100). Three broad themes were explored: how these immigrant populations experience unemployment; their previous legal and labour market situation and difficulties in the process of integration into the Portuguese society; and, finally, the kind of strategies they use (or may envisage in the near future) to overcome unemployment. The focus groups were carried out in June 2012 in the regions of Coimbra, Leiria and Lisbon, where access to interviewees was facilitated by privileged informers, such as members or representatives of Immigrants' Associations. All the interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed and submitted to a content analysis.

Additionally, 59 online survey questionnaires were administered to immigrants unemployed (33 men and 26 women) predominantly from Brazil, Ukraine and Cape Verde. The questionnaire was made available online in November 2012 and the response rate was rather limited due to the voluntary character associated with the procedure, the known limits of online surveys (difficulties of internet access, for example) and, again, to individuals' unwillingness in assuming and reporting their unemployment condition.

It is, therefore, a small-case study from which empirical generalisations should not be made, though theory can still be generated. Our assumption is that data engendered both from the focus groups and the online survey may help us perceive how unemployment is experienced by immigrants what kind of alternative strategies, determined both by personal and institutional circumstances, are available to them.

In a more specific way, we intend to test if and how individual choices are conditioned by the powerful, structural, institutional limits. Our first hypothesis (H1) is that the welfare state weaknesses and labour market's high levels of segmentation make immigrants' unemployment situation more socially and economically vulnerable. Our second hypothesis (H2) is that the existence of (strong/weak) social networks and the situation in the country of origin are linked with dissimilar unemployment experiences and chances of returning to the labour market. Based on field work involving the three largest foreign communities', we also research more specific hypothesis that intersect immigrants' individual and household characteristics with the institutional obstacles mentioned above, that is a weak welfare system and a high level of segmentation of the labour market:

H3.1 For some immigrant communities, return to the country of origin and/or re-emigrate to another destination may not be envisioned because of an unbearably difficult situation in the country of origin.

H3.2 Due to limited levels of compensation and coverage provided by unemployment and other social protection mechanisms, strong family and/or (co-ethnic) dense local networks can provide strong compensating support.

H3.3. When immigrants' unemployed hold a (Portuguese) European Citizenship and have access to unemployment and/or other social benefits, their possibility of managing their unemployment condition is somehow facilitated.

The text is structured as follows. Firstly, we address the labour market depressive moment after the crisis and underline how the limits of the sub-protective welfare state regime were pushed forward. Secondly, we analyse how Brazilians, Cape Verdeans and Ukrainians experienced unemployment and internal differences between the three groups. Then, we scrutinize the role of social networks in preventing immigrants from a vulnerable social and economic situation, influencing their reintegration into the Portuguese labour market and/or encouraging their decision to return to home countries. We show that immigrant communities' internal specificities, linked with circumstances in the country of origin, determine immigrants' distinctive choices. In the conclusions, we suggest that national institutional arrangements constrain immigrants' inclusion in the labour market and in the welfare system, determining higher risks of unemployment and, for some groups in particular, limit the chances of being adequately protected and/or overcome job loss in a period of economic downturn.

### ***A depressed labour market and a weak and fragmented welfare state in a period of crisis***

As other southern European welfare states, the Portuguese system of welfare is characterized by its late development, inequalities (e.g. segmented occupational categories) and gaps (Ferrera, 1996). Among its distinctive traits lie the imbalances of protection between “guaranteed and non-guaranteed workers”, the important role of the family, the combination of insurance schemes and universal programs, high levels of corruption, clientele, tax evasion and a very extensive underground economy (Ferrera, 2005; Moreno, Pino, Marí-Klose, Moreno-Fuentes, 2014). Under a Bismarckian and corporatist orientation, the Portuguese social insurance system is financed mainly by the contributions of employers and employees in work-based insurance schemes and is characterized by welfare transfers in cash, related to earnings. A distinctive element used to rest in the generosity of social protection provided to the core sectors of the labour force located within the regular or “institutional labour market”, in contrast to the weak subsidization delivered to those located in the so-called irregular or non-institutional market (a fairly large occupational sector) (Ferrera, 1996). In recent years, and more intensely since the macroeconomic adjustment programme, signed in May 2011, with the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the gaps between the two groups were, to some extent, attenuated. This occurred not because the levels of generosity offered to core workers broadened or peaked, but because workers, like public servants, saw their earnings (pensions

and salaries), and income replacement benefits for short-term risks (e.g. sickness, unemployment) decrease (Carmo, Cantante, 2015; Moreira, Ángel, Antunes, Karamessini, Raitano, Glatzer, 2015). This was a period of massive job losses with harsher effects on social groups feebly protected by the system of welfare, in particular the ones excluded from regular, more secure employment, as it was the case of immigrants (Ponzo et al., 2015). During the recession, the country new unprecedented levels of unemployment and the social situation deteriorated, with poverty increasing among the working-age population (Arnold, Rodrigues, 2015). This was linked with the social protection regime in place before the crisis and its incapacity of inhibiting the more vulnerable populations to become even more socially excluded. Contrary to the tendency registered in other EU countries (Reyneri, Fullin, 2011), the gap between foreign workers and natives' unemployment levels and material deprivation widened during the recession (Esteves, Fonseca, Malheiros, 2017). This is somehow unexpected, considering that immigrants have continuously shown activity rates higher than nationals and admitting that, in theory, their risk of unemployment would have been smaller as an effect of their lower level of protection by labour laws and welfare generosity. On the other hand, it is admissible that it was cheaper to fire immigrants rather than natives (Sá, 2011). Moreover, being a new receiving society in which most immigrant inflows were labour related, a situation of (sometimes long-term) unemployment would be unforeseeable by immigrants' themselves as their legal insertion into the Portuguese society depended on the existence of a formal work relationship and their decision to migrate was work related (Valadas et al., 2014).

### ***A new wave of immigrants in the Portuguese labour market***

Until the mid-1990's, the presence of immigrants in Portugal was generally low and the main migratory movements occurring were rooted in the country's colonial past, its historical and cultural links, as well as its main economic connections. In the late 1990s, an unexpected change occurred in the Portuguese migratory patterns, when immigrants coming from Eastern European countries (e.g. Ukraine, Moldova, Russia) responded to the boom in the construction and building sector (Baganha, Marques, Góis, 2004, 2010; Góis, Marques, 2010).

In 2003, Ukrainians, Brazilians and Cape Verdeans accounted for 52.6% of the total number of immigrants from third countries living legally in Portugal. In 2013 they remained the three largest groups, but their proportion in the immigrant population decreased to 44%, Brazilians being the group whose number of immigrants reduced the most (after Moldovans) (12.8% in comparison with 2012) (Peixoto, Padilla, Marques, Góis, 2015). This overlapped with the more intense period of the economic crisis, when thousands of jobs were lost, affecting the activity sectors where immigrants were throughout integrated. Despite increasing diversification, in 2017 the weight of the three groups continued to reach 36.3% of the total foreign immigrant population (including 20.3% from Brazil, 8.3% from Cape Verde and 7.7% from Ukraine).

Table 1. Evolution of foreign population in Portugal, by nationality, 2007–2017

Year	Total	Brazil	Cape Verde	Ukraine	Romenia	China	Angola	Guinea-Bissau	UK	S. Tomé e Príncipe	Spain	Moldavia
2007	435 736	66 354	63 925	39 480	19 155	*	32 728	23 733	*	*	*	14 053
2008	440 277	106 961	51 353	52 494	27 769	*	27 619	24 390	*	*	*	21 147
2009	454 191	116 220	48 845	52 293	32 457	*	26 557	22 945	*	*	*	20 773
2010	445 262	119 363	43 979	49 505	36 830	15 699	23 494	19 817	17 196	10 495	*	15 641
2011	436 822	111 445	43 920	48 022	39 312	16 785	21 563	18 487	17 675	10 518	*	13 586
2012	417 042	105 622	42 857	44 074	35 216	17 447	20 366	17 759	16 649	10 376	*	11 503
2013	401 320	92 120	42 401	41 091	34 204	18 637	20 177	17 846	16 471	10 304	9 541	9 971
2014	395 195	87 493	40 912	37 852	31 505	21 402	19 710	17 981	16 559	10 167	9 692	8 460
2015	388 731	82 590	38 674	35 779	30 523	21 339	18 247	17 091	17 230	9 546	10 019	6 948
2016	397 731	81 251	36 578	34 490	30 429	22 503	16 994	15 653	19 384	8 968	11 133	6 125
2017	421 711	85 426	34 986	32 453	30 750	23 197	16 854	15 198	22 431	8 605	12 526	5 210

Note 1: RIFA Reports from 2013 onwards include several other nationalities.

Source: Immigration and Borders Service, various years; available at: <http://sefstat.sef.pt> [access date: 14.12.2018].

With the overall immigration increase in Portugal, and in line with the trends in international migration in other European countries, there was a noticeable diversification of immigrants' nationalities and the emergence of diversified profiles in terms of labour market integration. To a certain extent, the typical situation of a segmented and gendered integration into the labour market (where men typically worked in the building and construction sector and women in specific segments of the service sector, such as caring and cleaning) became more varied (though it persisted for some groups of immigrants like Cape Verdeans and Guineans). There was also an increase in the feminization of flows, as women were given a new kind of autonomy, playing a central role within migratory processes (Góis, Marques, 2012; Peixoto, 2009; Oliveira, Gomes, 2017).

**Table 2. Evolution of foreign population in Portugal, by main national group and gender, 2007–2017**

Year	Total		Brasil		Cape Verde		Ukraine	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
2007	240096	195640	31834	34520	35075	28850	24243	15237
2008	230566	209711	49467	57494	24618	26735	30070	22424
2009	234412	219779	52061	64159	23227	25618	29500	22793
2010	225564	219698	52478	66885	20773	23206	27165	22340
2011	219137	217685	47518	63927	20800	23120	25883	22139
2012	206513	210529	44127	61495	20200	22657	23147	20927
2013	195544	205776	36515	55605	19948	22453	20746	20345
2014	191565	203630	33956	53537	19095	21817	18679	19173
2015	188645	200086	31700	50890	18007	20667	17436	18343
2016	192801	204930	30938	50313	16899	19679	16700	17790
2017	205874	215837	32900	52526	16160	18826	15530	16923

Source: Foreigners and Border Service, various years ([www.sef.pt](http://www.sef.pt)) [access date: 04.11.2018].

A detailed analysis by occupational groups shows that immigrants were not similarly distributed throughout the economic sectors. Between 2007 and 2011–2012, there was an overall increase (from 26.4 to 34.4%) in the proportion of employed immigrants working in commerce, tourism industry and catering services. In the building and construction industry, the number of employed foreign workers considerably fell between 2008 and 2015. All these economic sectors were particularly affected by the economic and financial crisis after 2008. Concurrently, activities related with human health and social care showed a more stable path and resilience to the economic crisis. This explains why women, working primarily in the domestic cleaning, health and caring services, were less exposed to unemployment than men, at least for a certain time.

Apart from occupational segmentation, a substantial proportion of immigrants in Portugal performed low skilled and low paid non-moveable jobs. As in other Southern European countries, they are “pushed into the lowest strata of the occupational structure” (Panichella, 2017), meaning that they are, usually, employed in worse jobs and are paid less, occupying jobs which would not otherwise be filled by natives or in the informal sector (Baldwin-Edwards, 1999; Peixoto, 2008, 2013). Though the total share of immigrants in the lesser and low skilled jobs diminished between 2000 (61.9%) and 2012 (52.3%), this did not result from immigrants’ labour mobility, but from a decrease in the number of immigrants in these groups, or eventually to a transition into a different labour arrangement or condition (e.g. inactivity). Even so, in 2015, 32.3% of immigrants’ working in the private sector were classified as non-skilled, in contrast with 12.5% of Portuguese workers, as attested in the *Quadros de Pessoal* dataset.

**Table 3. Foreign population working for others, by main professional group, 2007–2015**

Professional groups	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
G1	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.5
G2	2.7	2.8	3.1	4.0	4.4	4.9	5.0	5.0	4.9
G3	3.8	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.2	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.6
G4	7.3	7.2	7.6	6.4	7.0	7.1	7.8	8.4	8.7
G5	19.6	20.8	22.1	23.5	24.6	24.5	24.3	23.8	24.2
G6	2.6	3.0	3.3	2.9	2.9	3.2	3.4	3.6	3.7
G7/8/9	61.9	60.3	57.5	56.8	54.5	52.3	52.4	52.2	51.3
TOTAL N	158 008	170 086	155 511	143 081	134 064	112 065	107 700	110 391	116 011

Note 1: The total is different from the sum of parts due to the inclusion of workers without any specific profession.

Note 2: G1: managers; G2: professionals; G3: technicians and associate professionals; G4: clerical support workers; G5: service and sales workers; G6: skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers; G7: craft and related trades workers; G8: plant and machine operators, and assemblers; G9: elementary occupations.

Source: based on data from the GEP (workforce data tables), 2007–2015.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the recent history of migration into Portugal lies in the fact that long-term migration strategies have prevailed among immigrants. Within a humanist and generous framework, a considerable part of the Portuguese legislation has been oriented towards the integration of immigrants within a long, and permanent time perspective (Góis, 2010; Góis, Marques, 2010). The regularization processes, developed

primarily in the first years of the 21st century, were focused on the centrality of work and made it possible for immigrants already involved in the Portuguese labour market to become legal. At the same time, policies to promote family reunification became more inclusive (Marques, Góis, Castro, 2014). Initiatives to extend immigrants' access to fundamental social rights (e.g. education, health care) were implemented, contributing to the consolidation of Portuguese integration policy since the 1990s as a long-term process linked to a continuation of labour activity, one of its distinctive elements being the relationship with the social security system. Immigrants in a regular employment situation and with valid residence permits have access to social security programs under the same conditions as native workers, both in the contributory and non-contributory systems (Peixoto, Marçalo, Tolentino, 2011).

Like any other Portuguese worker in the private and public formal sectors, immigrants can receive financial benefits (e.g. unemployment insurance benefits) towards which they have previously contributed, linked both to their previous salary and work history, on the condition that they seek work and comply with the rules (Simões, Lopes, 2010; Peixoto, 2011). Immigrants who are ineligible for unemployment insurance can still benefit from non-contributory assistance programs (e.g. unemployment assistance benefit, social insertion income, child allowances) (Social Security Law 4/2007, articles 37<sup>o</sup> and 40<sup>o</sup>). They can also be covered by other mechanisms of support (e.g. school for their children, social housing, emergency health care) provided by municipalities or civil society organizations, regardless of their legal and employment situation in the country. Otherwise, if they are not legally working nor residing in Portugal and choose not to make contributions to the social security system<sup>5</sup>, they may find themselves in a vulnerable economic and social condition, as is often the case with independent and domestic workers (Peixoto, 2011).

### ***The effects of the crisis and the rise in unemployment among immigrant populations***

The high level of segmentation that characterises the Portuguese labour market and the two-tier nature of the system of welfare, conditions access to social benefits. During the crisis, the large group of under-protected, including a considerable proportion of immigrant populations, widened. Their over representation in the informal economy or in precarious work arrangements, and in highly cyclical activities made them especially vulnerable to the deterioration of working conditions and gaps in social protection (Peixoto, 2013; Oliveira, Gomes, 2017). Often, they would also accumulate other elements of vulnerability, such as being concentrated in narrow geographical areas (geographical segmentation), having lower levels of education and poorer language fluency. They

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<sup>5</sup> A considerable number of immigrants does not make their contributions to the system, either because they are not familiar with the rules of the social system or because they depend more on informal networks, as it happens with the first migratory waves (Peixoto et al., 2011).

might also not be familiar with the social security system or the functioning of Public Employment Services (PES)<sup>6</sup>. For some groups in particular, the possibilities of relying on alternative (and, sometimes, complementary) social networks are fewer or, eventually, less effective, namely, in helping them find a new job, return to the origin country or provide financial or other forms of material support.

Differently from other Southern European countries, immigrants' unemployment started to rise well before natives' employment losses reached very high levels and remained well above that of the native-born during the more intense period of the recession. This results from their high activity rate and their overrepresentation in low skilled or unskilled jobs in the industry and construction sectors, where strong impacts from the crisis were felt at an early phase. In 2013, when national unemployment peaked to more than 16% for the native population, approximately 30% of third countries' nationals was unemployed. Data from registered unemployment show that migrants from Brazil, Cape Verde and Ukraine, have seen their unemployment rise continuously until 2006, and then again after 2009, when unemployment levels deepened also for the native population<sup>7</sup>. Until 2016, they remained the three largest unemployed groups among third countries nationals' workers. Immigrants unemployed concentrated mostly in the regions of Lisbon and Algarve, where the greatest job opportunities used to exist. A breakdown by gender shows that the number of women registered as unemployed constantly rose between 2003 and 2013 (except in 2011), while the number of men increased from 2003 to 2006, decreased in 2007 and 2008, and from 2009 to 2013 raised again (only interrupted in 2011). Between 2010 and 2013, the proportion of women unemployed was inferior to men's confirming that the sectors more affected by the crisis were the construction, manufacturing and services branches, in which men were highly represented (Peixoto, 2013; Fonseca, McGarrigle, 2014). Otherwise, women's lower level of representation in registered unemployment might have reflected a more vulnerable employment condition (Egreja, Peixoto, 2013), since they usually receive lower salaries (Casaca, Peixoto, 2010), are commonly involved in irregular forms of work, mostly in the cleaning and caring services, in the underground economy, and their contribution to the social security system is generally weaker<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> In this respect, a "Strategic Plan for the Integration of Immigrants" (2007–2009 and 2010–2013) was implemented throughout different periods, aimed, namely, at informing immigrants about their rights and obligations and to make public services more sensitive to intercultural diversity. In spite of its interest and opportunity at the level of principles and ideas, the real contribution to the amelioration of immigrants' living conditions in the country remains inconclusive.

<sup>7</sup> As data on unemployment is not disaggregated by country of origin, we rely on registered unemployment data from the Portuguese Public Employment Service, IEFP. These numbers do not, however, include the entire unemployed population, since registration is not mandatory namely for people with no access to social benefits or the ones whose social protection benefits ended.

<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, from 2008 until 2010, the number of immigrant women contributing to the social security system increased, reducing the gender gap (Peixoto et al., 2011).

**Table 4. Immigrants Registered Unemployment and Beneficiaries of Unemployment Benefits (UB), 2003–2016**

Year	Immigrants Unemployed				Beneficiaries UB			
	Immigrants' registered unemployment	Men	Women	Portuguese Registered Unemployment*	Men	Women	Immigrants' beneficiaries of all UB** and UI***	Portuguese beneficiaries of all UB
2003	16 389	8 779	7 610	452 542	194 995	257 547	13 630	433 831
2004	18 938	10 012	8 926	468 852	204 713	264 139	18 078	484 646
2005	20 792	10 932	9 860	479 373	206 198	273 175	23 154	506 311
2006	22 485	11 503	10 982	452 651	192 042	260 609	26 000	506 472
2007	22 158	10 728	11 430	390 280	157 272	233 008	25 922	474 757
2008	20 337	8 723	11 614	416 005	180 661	235 344	28 859	454 525
2009	27 810	13 565	14 245	524 674	248 237	276 437	U	547 450
2010	39 528	20 946	18 582	541 840	251 062	290 778	U	582 608
2011	37 914	19 589	18 325	650 134	290 146	314 988	38 803	553 214
2012	41 316	21 875	19 441	710 652	352 424	358 228	35 898	638 317
2013	43 327	22 941	20 386	690 535	337 688	352 847	34 643	654 933
2014	36 105	17 887	18 218	598 581	291 462	307 119	29 674	583 523
2015	29 156	13 761	15 395	555 167	267 051	288 116	21 900	524 791
2016	26 430	11 803	14 627	482 556	227 209	255 347	19 489	463 121

\* IEFP (several years); available at: <http://www.iefp.pt/estatisticas/MercadoEmprego/EstatisticasMensais/Paginas/Home.aspx> [access date: 14.12.2018].

\*\* MTSSS.

\*\*\* Oliveira, Gomes, 2016, 2017.

U — unavailable.

Note: Data on registered unemployed refer to January each year, with the exception of the year 2004 when, due to difficulties in obtaining the monthly report, data refer to the following month (that is February).

Sources:

Between 2008 and 2013, the proportion of registered unemployed immigrants increased more than that of natives, respectively 113% and 44%. Since 2013 the proportion of immigrants unemployed registered in the Employment Offices started to decline due to a reduction in the number of foreign residents in Portugal and a sharp decline in new arrivals. In 2014 the total foreign population was inferior to 400,000 individuals (Oliveira, Gomes, 2017) and the decline in the number of immigrants' unemployed was

noticeable, predominantly for men. In response to unemployment, some immigrants choose to re-emigrate or returned to their origin country, since they could not afford being unemployed for long periods of time (Reyneri, Fullin, 2011). In some other cases, they were “statistically moved” into a different labour market category, either because they were seeking work but not immediately available, or available to work but not looking for a job (Fuente, 2011). It is also possible that they were administratively excluded from registered unemployment, as their unemployment benefits ended. Mostly since 2014/2015, there was an overall decrease in the unemployment rate, reflecting a gradual improvement of the labour market situation, even if this has been achieved based more on job quantity than on job quality, this is, throughout precarious jobs (Piasna, 2017).

***Disparities in welfare provision and different risks  
of social marginalization.  
How the three immigrants’ groups experienced unemployment***

The nature and the forms of intervention of the welfare state in a situation of unemployment, combined with the support provided by the family and the economic situation play a decisive role on the level and quality of protection provided to unemployed individuals and their chances of returning to the labour market. In a study where they analysed the experience of unemployment under different types of welfare regimes, Duncan Gallie and Serge Paugam (2000), showed that the system of unemployment benefits (UB), the development of active employment policies and the form and stability of family structures, along with the pattern of economic development and the rapidity of sectorial change showed salient points of divergence regarding the social regulation of unemployment. In their typology made of four ideal types, Portugal is included in the sub-protective unemployment welfare regime (ibidem). It is characterised by a weak coverage of the unemployed by the insurance-based system of social protection, and a low level of financial compensation. The under-development character and inefficiency of active labour market policies also limit unemployed people chances of finding a job or upskilling. Another characteristic is the weak independence of the individuals from reliance on other family members. As for the economic context, the inability to generate jobs in periods of crisis and the late sectoral change (from agriculture to the industrial sector and, more recently, to the services sector) represent additional risks. Regarding all these three dimensions, the three immigrants’ communities had, apart from shared constraints and difficulties, different unemployment experiences.

The total share of immigrants’ beneficiaries of unemployment benefits reached a maximum of 6.9% in 2010 and dropped to 4.1% in 2015 and 2016 (Oliveira, Gomes, 2017). Within the last few years, Brazilians were the group with the highest proportion of individuals receiving unemployment benefits in result of bigger unemployment levels, followed by immigrants from Cape Verde and Ukraine. This reflects their higher weight in the Portuguese resident population and representation in the statistics collected by PES local offices. Their previous integration in specific sectors of the labour market is,

in this case, relevant. After a first wave of highly skilled professionals, in the beginning of the new century, a second wave of Brazilian immigrants occupied the more unskilled and precarious positions in the labour market (Egreja, Peixoto, 2013). By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the number of Brazilians in the commercial sector decreased and there was a transfer towards the construction and cleaning services, sectors particularly affected by the recession. Ukrainians were also deeply affected by the rising unemployment in Portugal. Field work conducted in 2013–2014 showed that a considerable proportion of Ukrainians interviewed or included in the survey had access to unemployment benefits. The fact that some of them hold higher levels of education and, in some cases, had previous migratory experiences in other EU countries, would make them value the importance of having regular labour contracts and contributions to the social security system. Therefore, they would rely on the system of welfare to counterbalance the effects of unemployment and, in some cases, take advantage of the portability of social rights inside the EU (Carmel, Sojka, Papież, 2016). The share of Cape Verdeans (e.g. when compared to other African groups) with access to unemployment benefits is smaller than the other two groups, reflecting their large insertion in the informal economy. In general, they would have a longer migration history in Portugal, would be territorially concentrated on certain suburban neighbourhoods, and rather rely on the support provided by the family or other informal social networks (thus depending on strong family and ethnic ties rather than formal welfare).

In the peak of the crisis, unemployment protection became stricter and introduced more limiting criteria, even if it included some extraordinary measures (e.g. in 2009 a set of employment policies were launched to promote employment and prevent redundancies and dismissals directed specifically towards the groups with lower employability). In recent years, more pressure was exerted on the unemployed for active job search. Active employment policies further developed, and additional responsibilities were attributed to the PES. Even so, their level of coverage and efficiency was revealed to be disappointing (Valadas, 2017). The absence of more a comprehensive coverage of both passive and active employment policies was particularly disadvantage for immigrants, in a time when job offers were very limited and public policies were unable to outline tailor-made, adequate solutions to address individuals' unemployment problems (e.g. helping them find new job opportunities). Immigrants were even more affected by the low level of income compensation, due to their more precarious previous labour market situation. Comparing 2012 with 2002, the average of per-month unemployment benefits received by Brazilians suffered a decrease of 22.2%, which was less pronounced in the case of Cape Verdeans (with less 3.4%). As for Ukrainians, even if the difference (more 7.4%) between the two years was more favourable, in 2012, the average per month amount of benefits corresponded to 460 euro in comparison with 553,31 euro for the native population (Oliveira, Gomes, 2014).

In Southern European countries, the imbalances and fragilities of the systems of welfare are, in part, compensated by the role played by the family or other social networks of support (Martin, 2015). The three immigrant groups under analysis experience different

situations in this regard. Namely during the recession, immigrants from Cape Verde could rely on the support of the family or other informal networks as a source of protection against the risks and needs related with unemployment. They also provided help in job-finding. Despite their potentialities and benefices, the risks of entrapment into “social network closure” can be very stringent (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, for instance, when Cape Verdeans activate informal mechanisms of support to find work in a new occupation or location, the social (and territorial) location of the actors involved limits their chances (and choices). This means that, apart from other factors such as the situation in the origin country, social networks can prevent immigrants’ decision to leave, while their integration in the lower strata of the occupational structure is reinforced. As for the two other groups, for different reasons, their reliance on social networks in Portugal is generally weaker. Often, Ukrainians would need to send remittances to their families (e.g. women and children) in Ukraine, more than depending on the family for the provision of welfare in a situation of unemployment or economic distress. On the other hand, the political and economic instable circumstances in Ukraine throughout the first decades of the new millennium, and the awareness of the higher living costs and diminishing job opportunities in other EU countries made their decision to return unreasonable. This was not the case with Brazilians within the same period. For them, the effects of the dramatic recession in Portugal (e.g. high unemployment levels, lack of job opportunities, recalibration of welfare policies), alongside more favourable economic circumstances in Brazil (these would gradually start to slow down) stimulated the decision to voluntary return (Reyntjens, 2009). Due to the specific patterns of Brazilian immigration to Portugal, as a result of different immigration waves, the family or ethnic network as “shock absorbers” were not a collective, alternative strategy.

To sum up, three different alternative strategies were to be found; Ukrainians rely on the Welfare State; Cape Verdeans are more dependent on the welfare society based on family and co-ethnic groups; Brazilians prefer to personalize decisions of return to home country.

## ***Conclusions***

In the paper, we underline the powerful role of institutions in explaining cumulative disadvantages faced by immigrant populations in Portugal during the economic post-2008 recession, in a context of profound labour market deterioration. The highly segmented configuration of the Portuguese labour market and the sub-protective character of the system of welfare widen the risks of unemployment and of social exclusion of immigrants’ communities. Their employment insecurity, and poor work relationships reinforce their more vulnerable condition when massive job loss occurs, and socio-economic conditions deteriorate. Furthermore, the traditionally polarized, work dependent welfare state regime restrains their access to social protection, and enhances their risk of social exclusion in times of economic crisis. This means that immigrants who do not have a previous contributory work trajectory and/or do not comply with the rules to access unemployment

benefits, are not entitled to UB. Even when they do, as it seems the case namely with Ukrainian immigrants, income protection is generally low and insufficient to grant minimum living standards.

In addition to labour market and welfare state institutions, social and ethnic networks play a decisive role in helping foreign populations cope with unemployment and envisage alternative strategies. This role is even more relevant due to the gaps and inequalities of the social protection system. However, we need to be careful in examining the processes of (re)construction and use of social and ethnic networks by migrant populations. Given their location, both in the social structure and in a given territory, the risk of social exclusion, or even stigmatization of their beneficiaries can be even more reinforced. The example given is the long-standing, territorially concentrated group of immigrants from Cape Verde. Even if they are part of strong social and ethnic networks that provide them with support when they become unemployed, and may help them in obtaining a new job, the risk of entrapment in the informal economy or in the lowest segments of the labour market is high.

Despite the limited scale of the study, we showed that different foreign communities may have distinct experiences of unemployment and face limited alternative strategies. Considering the low degree of de commodification that characterises the welfare system, it would be expectable to rely on the family and other social networks as either an alternative or complementary source of support, as asserted in one of our hypotheses. The three immigrant communities under analysis have, in this regard, different configurations. Our main point is that three types of factors — the social protection system (namely the one specifically directed to the unemployed), the support from the family and other social networks, and the economic circumstances both in the origin and destination country — are likely to have major implications for the experience of unemployment.

Another central premise relates with the centrality of work in promoting individuals' social integration, in particular, in the case of immigrant communities in Portugal. Considering that these are labour migration movements, when work is absent or lost, "the rupture of key social ties, social marginalization, and potential social exclusion is likely to occur" (Paugam, Zhou, 2007, p. 180). Moreover, the choice to return or re-emigrate to another country may be limited, due to constraining economic and political circumstances in the origin country or in other migratory destinations.

The experience of the three foreign populations scrutinized shows that there is a combination of factors determining the degree of social exclusion, and how they suffer, more or less intensely, insecurity *vis-à-vis* the labour market and social life in general.

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***Możliwości i wybory. Migranci w modelu ograniczonego państwa opiekuńczego***

***Streszczenie***

Od czasu kryzysu ekonomicznego warunki zatrudnienia pogorszyły się, a systemy państwa opiekuńczego kontynuowały proces reform. Także w krajach Europy Południowej sytuacja na rynku pracy uległa dalszym niekorzystnym zmianom. Imigranci byli jedną z grup społecznych najbardziej dotkniętych wysokim bezrobociem oraz niestabilnymi warunkami pracy. Artykuł koncentruje się na głównych grupach imigrantów w Portugalii (Brazylijczycy, Ukraińcy i obywatele Republiki Zielonego Przylądka). Ma on na celu ustalenie, czy i w jaki sposób, w zależności od różnych form wyjścia na rynek pracy oraz relacji z systemem ochrony socjalnej, poszczególne grupy imigrantów w różny sposób radziły sobie z wysokim bezrobociem i niestabilnymi warunkami pracy. W zależności od kraju pochodzenia, słabych/silnych sieci społecznych, bezpiecznej/niebezpiecznej pozycji w miejscu pracy lub okoliczności osobistych mogą albo pozostać, ponownie wyemigrować do innego kraju albo powrócić do swoich krajów pochodzenia. Analiza empiryczna oparta jest na zogniskowanych wywiadach grupowych z bezrobotnymi imigrantami, ankiecie internetowej i analizie danych statystycznych. Jej wyniki wskazują, że na podzielonym rynku pracy, przy słabym i rozdrobnionym systemie ochrony socjalnej decyzje migrantów wywołane są w większym stopniu przez strukturę społeczną niż czynniki indywidualne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** imigranci, bezrobocie, reżimy państwa opiekuńczego, Portugalia, sieci społeczne